

**Letter by 60 international civil society organisations to Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs:
“Resume Dutch funding for UAWC, reject Israel’s designation of Palestinian NGOs”**

Mr. Wopke Hoekstra

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

Ms. Liesje Schreinemacher

Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands

Concerns: Dutch government decision to end funding for UAWC

26 January 2022

Dear Minister Hoekstra and Minister Schreinemacher,

On 5 January 2022, your predecessors in the former Dutch government [announced](#) that the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) will no longer be funded by the Netherlands.

We, the undersigned 60 civil society organisations based in Europe and elsewhere, share UAWC’s [sense of shock](#) about this decision and join the [loud call](#) of the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) in solidarity with UAWC.

Your government’s decision to end its funding for UAWC comes at the most vulnerable hour for Palestinian civil society, after Israel designated six leading Palestinian NGOs, including UAWC, as “terrorist organizations” last October.

This designation is the culmination of years of aggressive campaigns by the Israeli government and groups affiliated with it, relentlessly targeting Palestinian civil society. The agenda behind these campaigns is entirely clear. They seek to shield Israel from exposure and accountability for its grave violations of international law and human rights, enabling it to entrench its occupation, expand its annexation and deepen its apartheid in Palestine – and all of that with impunity. These campaigns amount to political persecution, inflicted on an oppressed population, in order to break its lawful resistance against a foreign occupation characterized by decades of collective dispossession and imprisonment.

For many years, the Netherlands has been a leading partner and donor of Palestinian civil society in its struggle for freedom, dignity and justice. It was one of four European countries funding the International Human Rights and International Law Secretariat – until this vital civil society mechanism disintegrated in 2018 after years of Israeli attacks and smear campaigns.

As the host country of key international legal institutions, including the International Criminal Court, the Netherlands used to be known as a beacon of support for human rights defenders, including in Palestine. It has also been known for its funding of NGOs preserving the Palestinian presence in Area C of the occupied West Bank – most notably through its funding since 2007 of UAWC.

Your government’s decision to end its funding for UAWC marks a sharp break with this principled engagement and severely harms your country’s credibility and standing vis-à-vis Palestinian civil society. This is in large part due to your government’s official reason and motivation for defunding UAWC: thirty-four alleged “individual links” of board and staff members of UAWC with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), identified during an external investigation launched by the former Dutch government.

In 2003, the European Union has designated the PFLP as a terrorist organization, subjecting it to financial sanctions. However, your government's decision to defund UAWC does not follow from this designation and sanctions.

On the contrary, the external investigation launched by the former Dutch government found:

- no indications of financial flows and no organizational unity between UAWC and the PFLP
- no indications that the PFLP directs UAWC
- no indications of links between UAWC and the armed wing of the PFLP
- no indications that board and staff members have used their position at UAWC to organise or support terrorist activities

Based on this investigation, the former Dutch government determined “it cannot be concluded from this investigation that there are organisational links between UAWC and the PFLP.” Therewith, the results of the investigation and your government's assessment of it entirely dismissed Israel's grounds for designating UAWC as a “terrorist organisation”.

This unequivocal outcome of the investigation provided strong grounds and reasons for the previous Dutch government to maintain its funding for UAWC. Its decision to still defund UAWC based on alleged links of board and staff members with the PFLP is clearly politically-motivated and responding to Israeli pressure. It marks a deeply troubling policy shift away from the guiding principle, particularly relevant to contexts and conflicts in which human rights defenders and civil society are at great risk, to “Do No Harm”.

Apart from the serious harm it does to the standing and interests of UAWC, it has far-reaching negative implications for Palestinian civil society as whole and for international stakeholders. It fuels Israel's escalating attack on civic space and exposes other donors and stakeholders to targeted pressure campaigns. For Palestinian civil society, it creates unsolvable dilemmas, if only because domestic Palestinian law forbids discrimination based on political grounds. Any Palestinian civil society organisation funded by the Netherlands will be trapped in political conditionality and interference with staff and board members' political rights, which is unlawful and rejected in Palestine.

Such disruption is the intended effect of the Israeli government and groups like NGO Monitor, which for years have been exerting massive [efforts](#) to delegitimise, deplatform and defund Palestinian NGOs. We echo PNGO's [deep concern](#) that a value and law based country like the Netherlands now effectively assists these destructive and malign efforts.

Based on the above concerns and considerations, we call on you and the new Dutch government as a whole: **Review and reverse the decision of the previous government to end funding for UAWC – and resume UAWC's funding without delay.**

We seize this occasion to call on you to widen and increase your political and financial support for Palestinian civil society, which faces an existential crisis, endangering decades of hard work and investments in promoting human rights and providing humanitarian assistance in Palestine.

Apart from resuming its funding for UAWC, this **requires that the Dutch government firmly rejects Israel's designation of Addameer, Al-Haq, Bisan Center, Defence for Children-Palestine (DCI-P), UAWC and the Union for Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC) as “terrorist organisations”**. This should have happened months ago, considering that Israel has repeatedly failed to substantiate its allegations against these NGOs, as also acknowledged by the Dutch government.

Please state your government's rejection without delay. This is also relevant to preventing further politically-motivated designations by Israel, which would cause additional harm to Palestinian civil society organisations and human rights defenders.

Signed,

A Different Jewish Voice (EAJG)

Adalah Justice Project

Asociación Paz con Dignidad

Association «Pour Jérusalem»

Association Belgo-Palestinienne WB

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Association France Palestine Solidarité (AFPS)

Belgian Campaign for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (BACBI)

BIZILUR-Lankidetzarako eta Herrien Garapenerako erakundea

Broederlijk Delen

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

Charity & Security Network

CNCD-11.11.11

Collectif Judéo Arabe et Citoyen pour la Palestine

Comité pour une Paix Juste au Proche Orient (CPJPO)

Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT)

Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT)

Confédération Paysanne

docP - BDS Netherlands

EuroMed Rights

European Coordination Committees and Associations for Palestine (ECCP)

European Legal Support Center (ELSC)

European Trade Union Network for Justice in Palestine

Fagforbundet - Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees

Fédération Syndicale Unitaire (FSU)

Fresh Eyes - UK

Gate48

Groupe d'amitié islamo-chrétienne (GAIC)

Human Security Collective

ICAHD Finland

Independent Jewish Voices Canada

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions - UK
Jewish Voice for Peace
Kairos Sabeel Netherlands
La Via Campesina
medico international
MRAP (Mouvement pour la réconciliation et l'amitié entre les peuples)
Mundubat
Nederlands Palestina Komitee
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
NOVACT
ODV Salaam Ragazzi dell'Olivo Comitato di Trieste
Palestine Legal
Palestine Link
PAX
Pax Christi Vlaanderen
Platform of French NGOs for Palestine
Sadaka - the Ireland Palestine Alliance
Solsoc
The Rights Forum
Trade Union Friends of Palestine
Transnational Institute (TNI)
Union Juive Française pour la Paix (UJFP)
Union Syndicale Solidaires
Viva Salud
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders)