

August 14, 2018

To: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Re: Israel's Denial of Entry to Human Rights Advocates

We, the undersigned human rights advocates and lawyers, write to you in protest against the 14-hour detention and denial of entry into Israel of Vincent Warren, Executive Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights. Mr. Warren is a renowned civil rights lawyer, who has devoted his career to standing in solidarity with individuals from marginalized and oppressed communities. He is widely respected as a leading advocate in challenging racial, gender, and LGBT injustices. We are dismayed by Israel's apparent policy of denying entry to human rights defenders, such as Mr. Warren, who are critical of your government.

Mr. Warren was held and interrogated for 14 hours at Ben Gurion Airport on May 1, 2018, and forbidden entry into Israel, together with Ms. Katherine Franke, Professor at Columbia University Law School. While the Israeli government provided no reason or justification for its exclusion of Mr. Warren, the decision appears to be based on his human rights work and political viewpoints. This alarming behavior by the Israeli government resembles that of repressive regimes around the world, and is inconsistent with the democratic values that Israel claims to uphold.

Mr. Warren's denial of entry follows the Israeli government's pattern of excluding visitors, including United Nations human rights experts, based on their political viewpoints, perceived 'bias,' or merely because their presence assumes some form of criticism of Israel. This kind of political litmus test for human rights professionals attempting to document your government's actions sends a clear signal of intolerance, ideological exclusion, and censorship.

This pattern of political repression is especially salient given that other prominent human rights advocates have also been denied entry or had their visa revoked in recent months. For example, Mr. Raed Jarrar, Amnesty International U.S. Advocacy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, was barred from entry in October 2017 after interrogations about Amnesty's human rights work. And Mr. Omar Shakir of Human Rights Watch was served with a deportation order in May 2018 despite his lawful work permit in Israel (he is currently challenging the decision in Israeli court).

Equally troubling is Israel's continuous refusal to allow entry to United Nations independent experts whose mandate requires them to carry out human rights documentation missions. Particularly problematic was the detention and exclusion of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Professor Richard Falk, while he was on an official UN visit in 2008. Subsequent Special Rapporteurs, Makarim Wibosono and Michael Lynk, have also been refused permission to enter Israel, thus depriving them of the ability to fully comply with their mandates.

Unfortunately, these exclusions are not a recent phenomenon. Israel has a history of adopting and enforcing discriminatory national entry policies that exclude people based on their political views, religion, ethnicity, or national origin. These discriminatory practices have been broadly condemned as violating international human rights including those of U.S. citizens of Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim descent attempting to visit Israel or the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The U.S State Department has even warned that some “United States citizens of Arab or Muslim heritage (including Palestinian-Americans) have experienced significant difficulties and unequal and hostile treatment at Israel’s borders and checkpoints.”

With this letter, we call on the Israeli government to respect the human rights of all people, and to cease its practice of excluding human rights defenders and advocates based on their criticisms of the government. As a start, we urge the repeal of your government’s decision regarding Mr. Warren, Professor Franke, Mr. Shakir, and Mr. Jarrar. We look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

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