
Alert: Hamas

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Palestinian cartoonist Bahaa al-Bakhari has been sentenced to suspended jail time and a fine. CRNI has written to the Hamas organization protesting his treatment. While he is not in jail, this form of abuse is intended to stifle a cartoonist's willingness to tell the truth.

February 18, 2008

Honorable Ismail Haniyeh
Prime Minister HAMAS
Al-Masyoun, PO Box 2466, Ramallah

Dear Sir,

Our organization is an international NGO committed to the human and free speech rights of political cartoonists all over the world. We have been operating since 1991 and we currently have affiliate leaders in over 20 countries. It has come to our notice that earlier this month a Palestinian cartoonist, Mr. Bahaa al-Bakhari, and his colleague editor Akram Haniyehat of the newspaper Al-Ayyam were fined and given suspended sentences for publishing a cartoon you and other Hamas Parliamentarians found embarrassing. The cartoon was published in November, 2007.

I have been working intimately with these journalists for over 15 years. I can personally attest that while they use lighthearted humor and satire to deliver their message, they are above all else deeply interested in the truth.

I also gain from reading the Hamas manifesto that the truth is held in high honor.

Cartoonists Rights Network International carefully looked at policy statements of the Hamas movement to learn under which provisions of policy we might find any Hamas commitment to open expression of views. We find the document stresses the Hamas principles of nobility and honor. Dealing as they do with humor, satire, irreverence, and righteous indignation, political cartoonists are often vulnerable to accusations that someone's character may have possibly been dishonored. One of the laws they supposedly broke was enacted in 1936. Quite possibly out of date today.

Sir, I appeal to you to take the high road with our cartoonist colleague and recognize that the efforts of journalists to tell the truth as they see it can only strengthen the movement, not weaken it. If the Hamas movement is a moral response to repression, I cannot see how it is moral to act repressively towards journalists.

We kindly ask that charges towards these journalists and our cartoonist colleague be revisited and dropped.

Sincerely,