

Swiss government releases and deports Palestinian American journalist Ali Abunimah to Turkey

Kevin Reed
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After being jailed for three days and two nights, Palestinian American journalist Ali Abunimah was released by Swiss authorities on Monday and deported to Istanbul.

Abunimah, who is the executive director of the Electronic Intifada publication based in Chicago, confirmed his release in a Twitter/X post on Monday afternoon that included a photo of himself on the plane bound for Turkey.

He was arrested in Zurich, Switzerland, on Saturday just before a scheduled speaking event. Upon his arrival in Switzerland the previous day, the journalist was questioned by police for an hour before being allowed to enter the country. However, Abunimah was apprehended the following afternoon by three plainclothes officers as he walked down a street in Zurich to attend a pro-Palestinian teach-in.

After he was forced into an unmarked vehicle, Abunimah was not told where he was being taken or what the charges against him were. He was transported to an undisclosed location. During his detention, Abunimah was held incommunicado, denied contact with his family and was not presented with any formal charges. He was interrogated by Swiss defense ministry intelligence agents without legal representation.

In his post, Abunimah wrote, “I’m free. I wrote this on the plane and I’m posting it just after landing at Istanbul,” and then recounted the details of his detention:

On Saturday in a police interview in the presence of my lawyer they accused me of “offending against Swiss law” without ever

telling me what crime I had committed in Switzerland or listing any charges. As far as I know I have not been charged with any crime whatsoever and I was held in “administrative detention.” On Sunday morning, they took me from my cell for questioning by Swiss defense ministry intelligence agents without the presence of my lawyer, and they again refused to allow me to contact her or my family. I refused to talk to them without my lawyer and told them take me back to my cell. During my imprisonment I refused every meal and every cup of coffee or tea they offered me except the last meal, after I knew I would be going home. I accepted only water, which is the right of every human being.

He continued:

My “crime”? Being a journalist who speaks up for Palestine and against Israel’s genocide and settler-colonial savagery and those who aid and abet it. I came to Switzerland at the invitation of Swiss citizens to talk about justice for Palestine, to talk about accountability for a genocide in which Switzerland too is complicit. But while I was hauled off to prison like a dangerous criminal before I even had a chance to say a word, the Israeli president Isaac Herzog, who declared at the start of the genocide that there are no civilians in Gaza, no innocents, received a red carpet welcome in

Davos, a carpet soaked in the blood of the more than 47,000 known victims of the genocide and the thousands more still under the rubble, or who died of deliberately inflicted starvation and denial of medical care. And on this very day Netanyahu freely travels to Poland to make a mockery of the Auschwitz commemoration despite an outstanding ICC arrest warrant. That is the perverse, unjust world we live in.

Abunimah's arrest, detention and deportation have been condemned by human rights organizations and UN experts. Irene Khan, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, called the incident "shocking" and urged Switzerland to "urgently investigate and release" Abunimah. Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, emphasized that "the climate surrounding freedom of speech in Europe is becoming increasingly toxic, and we should all be concerned."

A petition demanding Abunimah's release garnered over 20,000 signatures and expressed the outrage over his detention internationally. Amnesty International's European office stated that, "the global crackdown on those who are critical of Israel's violations of Palestinians' human rights is alarming and must be immediately stopped."

Abunimah's arrest is part of the attack by Western imperialist governments on any expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people in the face of ethnic cleansing by Israel. The actions against Abunimah and others are the product of the fear within the ruling class of the mass opposition that exists to the Zionist regime of Netanyahu and his backers in the US and Europe.

Last year, several activists and journalists in Britain were arrested, raided or charged using "counter-terror" powers. They included Asa Winstanley, an associate editor at Electronic Intifada, whose home was raided and his computers and phones seized. Winstanley has not been charged with any crime, and the raid was condemned by the Committee to Protect Journalists and Britain's National Union of Journalists.

In his statement, Abunimah also expressed gratitude for the global support he received and reaffirmed his commitment to the defense of Palestinian rights. He stated, "This ordeal lasted three days but that taste of

prison was more than enough to leave me in even greater awe of the Palestinian heroes who endure months and years in the prisons of the genocidal oppressor."

Aside from Reuters, not one corporate media outlet has published a word about Abunimah's arrest, detention and deportation. Every other major newspaper and cable TV news networks maintained a stoney silence on the attack on the right of a US-based journalist to speak publicly in Switzerland about the unfolding war crimes being committed in Gaza and the West Bank by the Israeli government.

The attack on the founder and executive director of Electronic Intifada, which has been publishing since 2001, took place during the first week in office of the second Trump administration. The fascist president, who specializes in the big lie, has launched a multi-sided attack on the Constitution and fundamental democratic rights immediately following his inauguration on January 20.

Trump's attacks on democracy have been combined with calls for Israel to "clean" Gaza of Palestinians, the first US president to endorse the ethnic cleansing agenda of Israel. Speaking to reporters on Air Force One on Saturday, Trump said, "You're talking about probably a million and a half people, and we just clean out that whole thing."



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