

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 20, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write today about continued violence against journalists in Gaza. The recent targeted Israeli strike on a group of journalists and media workers, which killed six journalists, including well-known Al Jazeera journalist Anas al-Sharif, is just one example of attacks on reporters in Gaza, and part of a pattern of violence that has silenced the voices of far too many Gazan journalists.¹ Israel has not provided convincing evidence for its claim that al-Sharif was a Hamas militant. Absent a compelling explanation of the military objective for this attack, it appears Israel is publicly admitting to targeting and killing journalists who have shown the world the scale of suffering in Gaza, which would be a violation of international law.²

Given that Israeli actions have significant implications for U.S. national security interests, we seek more information about the State Department's awareness and analysis of this strike and other Israel Defense Forces (IDF) actions that have killed and injured journalists in Gaza. We urge you to press the Israeli government to protect journalists in Gaza and allow international media to access the territory.

Since October 7, 2023, over 190 journalists and media workers have been killed in Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon, the vast majority of whom were Palestinians killed in Gaza by IDF military action.^{3,4} Because no international journalists are allowed to report independently from Gaza, the world relies on these local journalists to understand what is happening in Gaza. They have been working under incredibly challenging conditions for almost two years with no relief or ability to leave, despite calls from international news organizations to let journalists in and out of Gaza.⁵ Local reporters have continued reporting despite being repeatedly displaced, losing family members, and living under constant threat of violence. These journalists, like the rest of Gaza's population, also have faced starvation in recent months.⁶ Israeli military action has injured scores of Palestinian journalists and the IDF has detained dozens, some of whom have been placed in arbitrary administrative detention without access to due process.⁷

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6200wnez73o>

² <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule34>

³ <https://rsf.org/en/rate-journalists-are-being-killed-gaza-there-will-soon-be-no-one-left-keep-you-informed>

⁴ <https://cpj.org/2023/10/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/statements/joint-statement-on-gaza-from-afp-ap-bbc-news-reuters#:~:text=%E2%80%9CWe%20are%20desperately%20concerned%20for,as%20those%20they%20are%20covering.>

⁶ <https://apnews.com/article/gaza-hunger-journalists-food-afp-32c19db56ddf9f3e6a847c76a676c7c9>

⁷ <https://cpj.org/2023/10/arrests-of-palestinian-journalists-since-start-of-israel-gaza-war/>

Twenty-two months into the war, the Israeli government continues to ban journalists from entering Gaza independently, despite standing calls from Israeli and foreign press in the country. With the exception of operational security requirements for journalists embedded with the IDF, all interested journalists must be allowed to report without restriction or censorship from Gaza. We urge you to prioritize journalists' immediate access to Gaza and guarantees from the IDF to ensure that it does not target them in its operations. We echo the over 200 leaders of news and press freedom organizations calling for "immediate, independent, and unrestricted international media access to Gaza and for full protection of journalists who continue to report under siege."⁸

We recognize the longstanding challenges to press freedom in Gaza predate Hamas's unspeakably brutal attacks on October 7, 2023. Hamas, a designated terrorist organization, has a record of harassing, obstructing, torturing, and using physical violence against journalists in Gaza.⁹ Several journalists were among the 1,200 people killed on October 7th. We strongly condemn Hamas's actions, both in its repression of the Palestinian people and its violent attacks against the Israeli people, and continue to call for the return of the remaining hostages. However, we must hold our closest democratic allies and partners to a higher standard than a terrorist organization when it comes to protecting the bedrock democratic value of freedom of the press. The number of journalists killed in Gaza raises serious questions about whether Israel is trying to prevent the world from seeing the horrific consequences of its war in Gaza.

The treatment of journalists in Gaza is catastrophic, but we are concerned that Israel's apparent repression of the free press is not confined to the Gaza strip. Journalists have been killed and injured by the IDF in Lebanon since the start of the war.¹⁰ Israel continues to crack down on journalists and media outlets in the West Bank.¹¹ And journalists in southern Syria face IDF harassment.¹² Israeli journalists and media organizations, especially those critical of government policies, like Haaretz, face legal threats and censorship.¹³

The United States must make it clear to Israel that banning and censoring media organizations and targeting or threatening members of the press is unacceptable and must stop. The absence of U.S. government support for accountability efforts serves to undermine U.S. moral leadership and credibility in the region and around the world. Promoting press freedom globally, protecting journalist safety, and advancing international laws and norms are essential to sustaining U.S. leadership as well as protecting and enhancing U.S. interests and values.

Considering our profound concern for the safety of journalists and demand for justice for targeted attacks on journalists, we respectfully request detailed responses to the following questions:

1. What information has the U.S. government received about the strike on Mr. al-Sharif and his counterparts?
 - a. Was the U.S. government consulted in the decision to conduct a targeted strike against Mr. al-Sharif, a well-known journalist?
 - b. Will the State Department call for an independent investigation into Mr. al-Sharif's killing?
2. What steps has the State Department taken to ensure that the IDF – a major recipient of U.S. security assistance – reforms its rules of engagement (ROEs) to mitigate harm

⁸ <https://cpj.org/2025/06/cpj-and-global-media-leaders-call-for-urgent-unrestricted-access-to-gaza-for-journalists/>

⁹ <https://cpj.org/2025/05/gaza-journalists-speak-out-about-hamas-intimidation-threats-assaults/>

¹⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/ISRAEL-LEBANON/JOURNALIST/akveabxrzvr/>

¹¹ <https://rsf.org/en/palestine-crackdown-against-journalists-intensifies-west-bank-and-east-jerusalem>

¹² <https://cpj.org/2025/08/israeli-forces-chase-hold-and-shoot-at-journalists-in-southern-syria/>

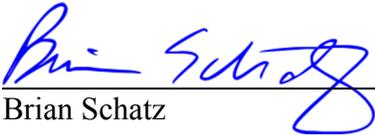
¹³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/11/25/middleeast/israel-sanctions-haaretz-over-comments-intl-hnk/index.html>

- to journalists in Gaza, the West Bank , Lebanon, and Syria, locations where the IDF operates with force?
- a. If the IDF is unwilling to revise its ROEs in ways that lessen harm to journalists, what steps are you considering taking to show U.S. government disapproval and secure policy changes that end the pattern of violent attacks on journalists?
 - b. Is it your assessment that the Israeli government has thoroughly investigated allegations of any wrongdoing in relation to killings and detentions of journalists, ensuring immediate and transparent accountability for any abuses?
 - c. Is it your assessment that Israeli government's actions in Gaza with respect to killings and detentions of journalists are in accordance with applicable U.S. laws and policies as well as international humanitarian law?
 - d. What support has the State Department provided to help injured journalists leave Gaza for medical care?
3. What steps have you taken to seek full accountability for the killings of journalists by the IDF?
- a. What steps have you taken to ensure meaningful accountability for the October 13, 2023 attack that wounded American Dylan Collins and killed Issam Abdallah in southern Lebanon?
 - b. Do you have information about the status of the reported Israeli investigation into the incident?
 - c. Do you have confidence that any Israeli investigation would result in effective accountability and serve to deter future IDF attacks on journalists?
4. What specific steps has the State Department taken to secure access for international journalists, including American citizens, to Gaza?
- a. Has the State Department formally asked Israel to permit entry to journalists seeking to report independently from Gaza? If so, in what ways, by whom, and how often?
 - b. Has the State Department expressed support for Israeli journalists and international correspondents in Israel who are seeking independent access to Gaza? If so, in what ways, by whom, and how often?
 - c. Has the State Department advocated for essential equipment for journalists, including cell phones, cameras, and safety equipment, to be allowed into Gaza?
5. What specific steps has the State Department taken to secure the release of journalists held in administrative detention by Israel?
- a. Has the U.S. Embassy assessed allegations of mistreatment of journalists in Israeli custody?
 - b. Have you discussed allegations of mistreatment of detained journalists with Israeli authorities, including IDF leaders?
 - c. What steps have you taken to identify the whereabouts of missing Palestinian journalists? Have you asked the Israeli government if missing journalists are in their custody?
 - d. Is it your assessment that the Israeli government has thoroughly investigated allegations of any wrongdoing, ensuring immediate and transparent accountability for any abuses or violations related to detentions?
6. What steps has the State Department taken to advocate the importance of press freedom within Israel?
- a. Have you or other State Department officials raised your concern over the closing of Al Jazeera's offices in Israel and the West Bank to the Israeli government? If so, what responses have you received?
 - b. Have you or other State Department officials raised your concern over the obstruction, harassment and detention of Israeli journalists within Israel?

7. What is the State Department's assessment of the impact on global press freedom of countries – especially closely allied democracies, like Israel – of placing restrictions on, detaining, or allowing or committing violence against journalists?

We appreciate your detailed response to these questions and look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,



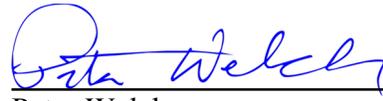
Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



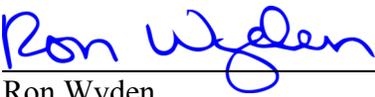
Peter Welch
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



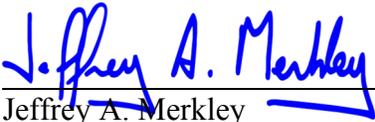
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



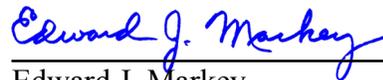
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



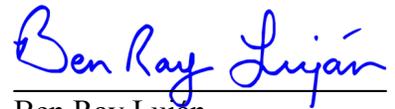
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



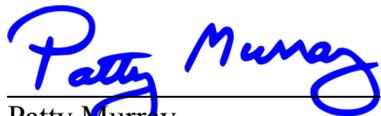
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator