We, healthcare organizations around the world, condemn the recent decision by the Israeli government to designate six leading Palestinian human rights organizations as “terrorist organizations”. This decree by the Israeli Defense Minister, Benny Gantz is yet another step to politically persecute those who oppose the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza — with its apartheid and colonial traits — and the resultant human rights violations. The decree has a direct implication for the thousands of Palestinians whom these organizations assist and for the many other human rights defenders that seek to protect the health and other fundamental human rights of Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory. We call on the Israeli government to repeal this decision and for the international community to condemn it.

This latest development is one of a series of attempts by successive Israeli governments to dismantle the Palestinian political and civilian leadership and curtail human rights activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and beyond. These tactics have included legislation, raids, arrest of prominent human rights activists — including [Dr. Shatha Odeh](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2821%2901793-1/fulltext) — and marking leading human rights organizations as illegitimate. The criminalization of those opposing authoritarian regimes as “terrorists”, and the expansion of the meaning of terrorism to include speaking out against this very repression is a known strategy by authoritarians worldwide.

The organizations targeted: Al Haq, Addameer, Defense for Children International-Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, the Bisan Center and the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees, all served to expose the human rights abuses that take place under the occupation and protect Palestinians impacted by it, including by violations of the right to health. Their assistance to farmers, prisoners, women and children must be lauded, not condemned. This is one of the few ways to oppose Israel’s military occupation, through which it exercises power and control over every aspect of Palestinians’ lives. Israel’s decision to mark the employees of these organizations as terrorist operatives puts them in danger of being arrested and prosecuted, their offices raided and their financial accounts frozen - impeding their important work, shutting them down and ultimately, silencing their powerful voices.

It is our duty and moral imperative to stand in solidarity by their side and by the side of all those who speak out for fundamental human rights in the face of rising oppression.