



7 Points on Ethical and Professional Journalistic Principles in Covering Israel's Genocide & Apartheid against Palestinians

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Introduction

If Israel's ongoing genocide against 2.3 million Palestinians in the illegally occupied Gaza Strip is the world's first [livestreamed genocide](#), Israel's deliberate, mass killing of Palestinian journalists and their families throughout this genocide, a phenomenon dubbed "[journocide](#)," is also without precedent in recent history. In November 2024, a UN Special Committee investigating Israeli practices against Palestinians [wrote](#): "Amid the devastation in Gaza, Israel's escalating media censorship, suppression of dissent, and targeting of journalists are deliberate efforts to block global access to information." It also noted how "social media companies disproportionately removed 'pro-Palestinian content' in comparison with posts inciting violence against Palestinians."

Beyond failing to ethically and professionally cover this genocide, most mainstream media outlets in the West have shamelessly enabled it. They have even failed to adequately challenge [Israel's ban on international journalists' entry to Gaza](#) (or the ban on human rights organizations) and some have accepted to enter Gaza and Lebanon [embedded with the invading Israeli army](#). Former senior UN human rights official Craig Mokhiber has condemned the role mainstream western media has played in enabling Israel's genocide [saying](#):

"The repeated non-critical recitation of false, dehumanizing Israeli propaganda by western media is not sloppy journalism -- it is war propaganda and incitement to #genocide for which they must be held accountable as their media counterparts were in the Nuremberg & Rwanda tribunals."

7 Ethical and Professional Journalistic Principles

Based on the above, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate and the Palestinian BDS National Committee, the largest coalition in Palestinian society and the leadership of the global BDS movement, call on international media outlets, journalists and journalists' unions to:

1. **Recommit to the basic principles of [journalistic ethics](#), resisting pressure from Israel and its lobby groups, and challenging racist and dehumanizing editorial biases;**
2. **End all institutional collaborations with Israeli media organizations that are on record promoting the dehumanization of, and racial hatred and violence against, Palestinians, and**

exclude from procurement and advertising contracts companies that are implicated in Israel's war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide;

3. **Refuse paid junkets to Israel organized by the Israeli government or lobby groups, refrain from "embedding" with Israeli military units, and demand that the Israeli government allow all journalists to enter Gaza without being accompanied by military or government personnel, to do their job professionally, without fear or favor;**
4. **Adhere to, and update style guides to adopt terminology that is grounded in international humanitarian and human rights law and used by the UN or authoritative human rights organizations in describing the context.** This includes acknowledging, as the ICJ has done¹, that Israel is perpetrating **apartheid** against Palestinians and its presence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is **illegal**; defining Israel's actions in Gaza as a **breach of the Genocide Convention** and plausibly constituting genocide²; and identifying Israel's Prime Minister as under an **ICC arrest warrant** for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza;
5. **Avoid the unprofessional and unethical, whether intentional or inadvertent, repetition of propaganda and misleading terminology propagated by the hegemonic/oppressor side;**
6. **Respect and defend the rights of journalists and media workers to publicly and openly express personal solidarity with the Palestinian cause** (outside the scope of their professional coverage), **without being penalized;**
7. **Name the perpetrator in your reporting, instead of hiding behind a passive voice, and center voices of those most affected by the situation of oppression or aggression, instead of always "balancing" those voices with the perspectives of the Occupying Power or providing far more space/time to the dominant narrative of the oppressors.**

As Pakistani-Canadian journalist Haroon Khalid [asks](#), "Should journalists still present all sides when we know that one side is lying, or that one side is clearly the oppressor? By giving the oppressor a means to justify their oppression, does journalism perpetuate the cycle of oppression?"

Background: Targeting Palestinian journalists & their families

Not only have most mainstream Western media outlets failed to fairly cover the genocide in context, they have also failed to report on the mass killing of their fellow Palestinian journalists, a fact that [courageous journalists in the West have protested](#). Documenting the unprecedented scale of Israel's targeting of journalists in Gaza, an authoritative [report](#) issued in October 2024 by the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate reveals that Israel's occupation forces have since October 2023³:

¹ In July 2024, the ICJ [ruled](#) that Israel was violating the prohibition against apartheid. This follows major reports proving that Israel is indeed perpetrating apartheid against Palestinians including those published by [Amnesty International](#), [B'Tselem](#), [UN experts](#), and [Palestinian human rights organizations](#). It also ruled that Israel's occupation is illegal.

² Following the [January 2024 ICJ determination](#) that Israel is plausibly perpetrating genocide in Gaza, the UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices reached in its November 2024 report the conclusion that Israel's warfare in Gaza meets the characteristics of genocide. It said, "Israel is intentionally causing death, starvation and serious injury, using starvation as a method of war and inflicting collective punishment on the Palestinian population ..."
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/271/19/pdf/n2427119.pdf>.

³ For up-to-date number of Palestinian journalists killed and injured by Israeli occupation forces since the beginning of the genocide in October 2023 see: <https://pjs.ps/en/index.html>.

- **Killed 167 Palestinian journalists**⁴ and media workers (including 21 female journalists), representing 11% of Gaza's journalists.
- **Killed 514 family members of journalists** in Gaza in "airstrikes targeting journalists' homes and places of displacement." Some 115 homes of journalists have been deliberately bombed.
- **Injured 357 journalists**, including 101 injuries that resulted from "the Israeli occupation deliberately targeting journalists with missiles and gunfire."
- **Destroyed 73 media institutions** in Gaza including 21 local radio stations, 3 broadcast towers, 15 news agencies, 15 satellite channels, 6 local newspapers, and 13 press service offices, and it shut down 16 media organizations in the West Bank, including Jerusalem.

Israel's widespread [threats to kill family members of Palestinian journalists](#) doing their duty of reporting from the field in Gaza during the genocide and its actual killing of those family members to punish the journalists are unprecedented in any "armed conflict." As has been widely [reported](#) as early as December 2023, there is a "pattern of targeting of [Palestinian] journalists and their families by the Israeli military." Palestinian journalists in Gaza have received "threats from Israeli officials and [Israeli military] officers before their family members were killed."

Israel's "total impunity"

In January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) determined that [Israel is plausibly violating the Genocide Convention](#) in Gaza, and in July 2024, it [ruled](#) that Israel's entire occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is illegal and must be brought to an end. It also found Israel guilty of violating the prohibition against apartheid in the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The International Criminal Court (ICC) on 21 November 2024 issued arrest warrants against Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and former war cabinet minister Yoav Gallant on war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the deliberate starvation, killing, and persecution of Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel could not have reached this level of what the UN Secretary-General describes as "[total impunity](#)" without the arming, funding and shielding from accountability provided by the West, led by the US. That much is common knowledge. In a poignant [letter published in Variety](#) in August 2024, almost 70 Palestinian filmmakers shed light on a less known form of complicity. They point to the dehumanization as well as "the erasure, racism and censorship" to which Palestinians have been subjected for decades as a key factor that has "enabled" the current genocide.

During Israel's deadly assault on Gaza in 2021, its air force [destroyed](#) an 11-storey building "housing some 60 residential apartments and a number of offices, including those of Al Jazeera ... and the Associated Press." Though televised, this crime went unpunished, feeding impunity.

Coverage of the entire Israeli assault was framed at the time as a "retaliation" to acts committed by Palestinian resistance groups. This "retaliation" dogma has taken hold of almost all Western coverage of Israel's carnage against Palestinians, including the current genocide, describing resistance by the

⁴ UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Irene Khan, in her report to the Human Rights Council in August 2024 wrote, "Silencing journalists by killing them is the most egregious form of censorship." <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/247/88/pdf/n2424788.pdf>

oppressed as the first instance of “violence” and ignoring the essential ethical principle that, in a situation of oppression, it is precisely [oppression that constitutes the initial violence and is the root cause of further violence](#).

Mainstream media coverage of Israel's targeted murder of Palestinian journalism icon Shireen Abu Akleh in 2022 displayed more of the same [ideological bias](#), colonial [racism](#), and utter ethical and professional failure that have [aggravated Israel's criminal impunity](#).

This framing, coupled with the pervasive and uncritical repetition of Israeli unsubstantiated propaganda claims, has contributed considerably to sanitizing, whitewashing, and even justifying Israel's crimes and entrenching its impunity and lack of accountability in accordance with international law.

Abandoning journalistic ethics

Israel's propaganda and intentionally misleading terminology have successfully *occupied* a central position in mainstream coverage given the unparalleled access Israeli military spokespersons and politicians have been afforded by media outlets. To exacerbate this process, many Western editors and journalists – out of [fear](#), [bias](#), or [both](#) – have abandoned basic principles of journalistic ethics by providing an open, uncritical and compliant platform to suspected Israeli war criminals to relentlessly entrench their dehumanization of Palestinians – reducing whole civilian populations to “human animals” or dispensables – and for their incitement to further racial violence against our people.

This is the context that has allowed the Israeli occupation forces to have the audacity and impunity to fatally target Palestinian journalists and their families in unprecedented numbers in Gaza—a *journocide*.

While the [right to freedom of opinion and expression](#) is universal, including controversial views, commitment to truth, challenging propaganda and [minimizing harm](#) are basic tenets of journalism. Refraining from allowing a media outlet to be used for incitement to violence or promotion of hatred against particular groups based on ethnic, racial, religious or other forms of identity is among the cardinal [ethical principles](#) of journalism.

The [Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists](#), adopted in 2019 at the International Federation of Journalists congress, says that:

“Journalists shall ensure that the dissemination of information or opinion does not contribute to hatred or prejudice and shall do their utmost to avoid facilitating the spread of discrimination on grounds such as geographical, social or ethnic origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, disability, political and other opinions.”

According to journalistic ethics standards, the professional obligation to be inclusive of all sides of a debate does not extend to providing a platform to spread lies or to incite racial violence, including by dehumanizing the victims of this violence and thus sanitizing and justifying the continuation of violence against them. This is particularly true at times of violent hostility, conflict or oppression, when such incitement can cost human lives and livelihoods or stoke genocide, ethnic cleansing and other war crimes or crimes against humanity, as defined in international law.