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Freedom of the Press Statement

Israel's closure of the Ramallah bureau of Al Jazeera in the West Bank
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FCCJ is deeply disturbed by the decision last week of the Israeli government to raid and forcefully close Ramallah bureau of Al Jazeera in the West Bank for 45 days, just five months after it shut down the Qatar-based network's operations in East Jerusalem.

Captured on live TV, the raid showed Al Jazeera's Ramallah bureau chief Walid al-Omari being handed a court order while heavily armed soldiers burst into the offices and confiscated the bureau's equipment. "Targeting journalists this way aims to erase the truth and prevent people from hearing the truth," al-Omari said.

A statement issued by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) after the raid said, "Israel's efforts to censor Al Jazeera severely undermine the public's right to information on a war that has upended so many lives in the region. Al Jazeera's journalists must be allowed to report at this critical time."

As the Middle East conflict widens, the public has a right to know what happens in war zones like Gaza, the West Bank and now Lebanon. The FCCJ Freedom of the Press Committee condemns any attempt to restrict the work of bona fide journalists, be it drone surveillance of their reporting activities, bombing of their tents, targeting of their vehicles as they travel for coverage and, in some instances, directly shooting at them.

As of October 1st, 2024, at least four Al Jazeera journalists, along with 112 other journalists, have been killed since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war one year ago, according to the CPJ, making the period the deadliest ever in the world since CPJ began keeping records in 1992.

Another Al Jazeera journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, an American-Palestinian dual citizen, who was killed by the Israeli army while reporting in Gaza in 2022, received the FCCJ Freedom of Press Asia Award posthumously in 2023.

Al Jazeera's bureaus in Gaza, Ramallah and East Jerusalem, all of which have now been either shuttered or heavily restricted, have covered not just the dire situation in lands occupied by Israel but also the civil unrest and protests within Israel against the government for its failure to bring back around 100 hostages held by Hamas since its October 7 terrorist attack.

The Israeli government accuses Al Jazeera of "incitement to and support of terrorism" and insists the court order is based on a law that allows the government to shut down foreign media in Israel, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), which has called for the repeal of this law.