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"SHAMS" Centre: The Palestinian government is moving from practices to legislation and policies in restricting freedom of expression.

Ramallah: "SHAMS" center received with a lot of astonishment and shock the Council of Ministers Decision No. 3 of 2021 to cancel Article 22 of the "Code of Conduct and Ethics for Public Service" according to the 181 of the Official Gazette, which **states** that "the employee has the right to express his/her opinion", and publishing it verbally or in writing, or other means of expression, taking into account the provisions of the legislation." The article subject of the cancellation states that "the employee, when expressing an opinion, commenting or participating in social media, must make it clear that he represents his personal opinion ONLY, which means that his point of view does not reflect the opinion of the government agency in which he works.

"SHAMS" Center said that it views this step with seriousness, which comes in a context of tension after the president issued a decree to postpone the general elections, which have been awaited for many years indefinitely, and after the killing of a prominent political activist at the hands of a joint security force saying that it was intending to arrest him which sparked a wave of angry peaceful gatherings in the Palestinian street that were suppressed by excessive force. This indicates an accelerated pursuit of systematic violations of the right to express opinion, and a shift from committing violations at a practice level from direct and field law enforcement agencies to a systematic institutional violation at the level of legislation and policies.

"SHAMS" Center **believes** that this decision is against the Palestinian Basic Law, especially the separation of rights and freedoms, which guarantees freedom of expression as a basic constitutional right, and the legal obligations of the State of Palestine under international conventions and treaties to which it has acceded, foremost of which is the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights.



"SHAMS" Center also **stressed** that the Cabinet's decision to cancel this article should not be obligatory or enforceable in any way, as it violates the principle of the legislative hierarchy, as the Palestinian Basic Law (Interim Constitution) and a number of laws guarantee freedom of expression, which was what the blog should respect. At the same time, he warned against the abuse of this step to suppress the public and private freedoms of public people by their officials or the government agencies they work for.

"SHAMS" Center **considered** that this decision, which is an insult to the international image of Palestine, as it is presented as a repressive state that violates rights and freedoms, and offends its people as a people under colonialism struggling for its national liberation. It is denounced, condemned and constitutes a violation of the employees' right to express their opinion and own their political opinions, and reflects a view of the employee as owned by the government and not as an employee working for it in return for a wage, which necessitates "SHAMS" Center to immediately withdraw from it, and instead take policies that promote freedom of expression is guaranteed in light of the widespread violations it is subjected to.