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**“SHAMS” Center: the arrest of human rights defenders lawyer Farid Al-Atrash and Shatha Odeh: A systematic colonial harassment against the civil sphere that will not deter Palestinian human rights activism**

Ramallah: With immense condemnation, “SHAMS” Center received the news of the arrest of Shatha Odeh, General Manager of the Health Work Committees (HWC) and the head of the Palestinian NGOs Network by the Israeli occupation forces, who raided her home, searched it, disarrayed its contents, and then confiscated her private car. Just a few days prior to that, the occupation forces had arrested the head of the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR)’s office in Southern West Bank, lawyer Farid Al-Atrash, at the military Container Checkpoint located to the east of Occupied Jerusalem. Al-Atrash was later transferred to the hospital due to the deterioration of the state of his health. These arrests of Palestinian human rights defenders coincided with the occupation forces’ conduction of a raid against the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) in the city of Ramallah and subsequent decision to arbitrarily shut the organization down for a re-extendable period of six months, which is a continuation of the occupation’s arbitrary and colonial approach towards professional unions that provide medical, humanitarian, and agricultural aid and services to Palestinian citizens living under the occupation. The forces had previously and in a similar fashion shut down the Health Work Committees (HWC), headed by Odeh.

“SHAMS” Center expresses its full solidarity with the colleagues and emphasizes that the occupation’s arrest of Odeh and Al-Atrash is motivated by their peaceful activism against the occupation’s human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and their provision of services within their civil activism to their local communities. Hence, these arrests are arbitrary and fall within the systematic colonial harassment efforts against the civil and human rights spheres in Palestine. They are also situated within a comprehensive and systematic defamation campaign launched by the Israeli colonial system and all of its tools, especially the Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Monitor NGO, a racist Israeli institution funded by the far right, against Palestinian civil institutions.



"SHAMS" Center said that these practices coincide with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Conference against Racism (2001), which was held in the city Durban in South Africa and was sponsored by the United Nations. The Conference deemed "Israel" an apartheid state and launched a global campaign to boycott it with the active participation of Palestinian NGO's that had succeeded in conveying the Palestinian narrative to global institutions. As soon as the conference ended, a vicious and an ongoing bone-breaking campaign was launched by the colonial establishment with all its tools against civil and liberative Palestinian activism.

"SHAMS" Center emphasized that this ongoing and lengthy chapter of violent colonial practices against the civil sphere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which particularly burdens the Palestinian civil society with a special responsibility and hefty price to pay, will not succeed in suffocation civil and non-governmental activism, the legitimacy of which derives from the International Bill of Human Rights, popular bases, and the local communities to which it provides services and fosters.

"SHAMS" Center emphasized that these Israeli practices that aim at harassing human rights defenders are not limited to Palestinian human rights activists. They extend to international and United Nations activists as well. "SHAMS" Center referenced the occupation's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' refusal to renew or grant residence visas for international employees working for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations' Human Rights Committee, the occupation forces' denial of requests by United Nations (and other international) war crimes investigation committees and Special rapporteurs to enter the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the perpetual media war launched by the occupation's media and diplomacy arms against the International Criminal Court for its decision to open up an investigation into possible war crimes that have either been or may currently be committed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as examples of these practices. All of these extremely coordinated steps aim at leaving "Israel's" crimes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory unmonitored and intimidating civil organizations and human rights defenders.

From its work site, the center sent a clear message stating that these practices, which reveal a deeply entrenched entitlement that respects neither international law nor the human rights system, will not exceed being desperate attempts to escape justice and enjoy perpetual impunity, and that although they may postpone due accountability, they will not succeed in achieving their goals.



Finally, “SHAMS” Center called upon all local, international, and United Nations human rights organizations and commissions to intensify their work and efforts to document, monitor, follow-up on, publish, and report violations of the rights of Palestinians. The center also called upon them to promote international alliances in manner that establishes a protection and defense umbrella for the rights of Palestinians and confronts any violations pertaining to them, irrespective of the authority responsible for such violations.