

OPINION

The administrative detention of Ubai Aboudi

The State Department should call for his immediate release

By Assaf Kfoury, Haynes Miller, Nasser Rabbat, Raid Suleiman, and Franz-Josef Ulm , Updated December 11, 2019, 1:36 p.m.



A Palestinian man passes a closed shop in the West Bank city of Hebron, Monday. MAJDI MOHAMMED/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Early in the morning of Nov. 13, a dozen Israeli soldiers entered a private Palestinian home in the occupied West Bank village of Kufur Aqab, and arrested Ubai Aboudi — who is an American citizen — and confiscated his US passport, according to his wife. She said that an Israeli military court subsequently sentenced him to four months imprisonment (since reduced to two). Under the Israeli system of “administrative detention,” or imprisonment without charge or trial, his captivity can be extended indefinitely. Human rights groups, including [Amnesty International](#), have condemned his arrest and urged Israel to release him immediately.

Aboudi is executive director of [the Bisan Center for Research and Development](#) in Ramallah, which advocates for democratic and progressive values in occupied Palestine. Its mission is to assist the weakest and most marginalized in Palestinian society, with a “vision of development for freedom, justice, and equality,” focusing in particular on the poor, young people, and women.

We came to know Aboudi through our membership in the local organizing committee for the third international [Meeting for Science in Palestine](#). This large meeting, sponsored by the international organization Scientists for Palestine, is scheduled to take place at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in January. It enjoys significant support from MIT and other scientific organizations. We invited a dozen Palestinian scientists to join us here in Cambridge and we were delighted by the offer Aboudi made to host a satellite conference at the Bisan Center. We had been working closely with him to facilitate this important educational event.

The objective of this conference, and of Scientists for Palestine, is to increase the quantity and quality of scientific contacts between researchers in the [Occupied Palestinian Territories](#), including the Gaza Strip, and the rest of the world. There is a great desire among Palestinian scientists to get on with their work — research often directed at saving lives and helping the environment — but the Israeli government imposes [many obstacles](#) on them. The January gathering is intended to address some of these difficulties by establishing new and ambitious objectives for scientific collaboration between partners in Palestine and the international community and by showcasing Palestinian scientists and scientific development.

Israel’s [arbitrary arrests and imprisonment](#) of Palestinians in the occupied territories deters individuals such as Aboudi from working toward the development of a Palestinian civil society. But in this case, it also has the effect of deterring international collaboration between Palestinians under occupation and scientists working in the United States and elsewhere in the world. This action by Israel’s government is a threat to our organization as well. It will have a direct and detrimental impact on our planned conference.

What makes this case even more alarming is that Aboudi is a US citizen, born in Bloomington, Ind. To date, the response of the Trump administration to his arrest has been muted. Since his imprisonment, his family and colleagues have been working tirelessly to get Aboudi released. However, without the support of the American government, we are fighting an uphill battle. We call upon the US State Department and President Trump to make every effort to secure his quick release.

In the meantime, Aboudi’s wife and children are preparing to spend an anxious Christmas without their husband and father, not knowing when he will return.

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