

Concept note | Invitation

THE WAR ON TRUTH: *Press freedom under Israeli occupation*
*A photography exhibition featuring the late Palestinian photojournalist Fatima
Hassouna & Colombian reporter Mauricio Morales Duarte*

“I condemn the killing of Fatima Hassouna and call for a thorough and transparent investigation. I reiterate my call to respect UN Security Council Resolution 2222 unanimously adopted in 2015 on the protection of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel as civilians in situations of conflict, a status recently reaffirmed in the UN Pact for the Future.”

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, UNESCO

In the run-up to the *High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution*, which will be held at United Nations headquarters in New York in June 2025, the Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations and the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, in collaboration with Reporters Without Borders, present **"The War on Truth: Press Freedom Under Israeli Occupation."**

This photography exhibition, featuring the work of the late Palestinian photojournalist Fatima Hassouna and Colombian photojournalist Mauricio Morales, **will be inaugurated on 10 June and will be on display at the Curved Wall space inside UNHQ from 9 to 13 June.** The exhibition will be complemented by a panel discussion, also on 10 June, entitled *"Journalism During Genocide,"* featuring Ms. Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967, along with other speakers.

BACKGROUND

In the past 19 months alone, more than 210 journalists — the vast majority of whom were Palestinians, including 28 women — have been killed by Israeli occupying forces (IOF), primarily in military attacks in Gaza, according to independent verification by the UN Human Rights Office. An additional 49 Palestinian journalists have been unlawfully detained and remain in Israeli captivity, subjected to inhumane treatment, including torture. During the same period, Israel has systematically prevented the foreign press from entering Gaza to document the destruction and death caused by its ongoing siege and genocidal onslaught against the Palestinian civilian population.

Palestinian journalists who have managed to survive and continue reporting from the ground face brutal conditions as the Israeli military aggression in Gaza and across the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), including East Jerusalem, ravages lives and infrastructure. As a result, journalists — like the rest of the civilian population — have been

subjected to repeated forced displacement, lack of shelter, starvation, disease and continual existential threats.

As the horrific casualty count reveals, Palestinian journalists and media workers are being denied the protections they are entitled to under international law, including international humanitarian law, and are being systematically targeted by Israel. Those striving to tell the world the story of the Palestinian people—and the truth about the genocide in Gaza—are under attack. We are witnessing a war on truth.

The deliberate targeting of Palestinian journalists reporting under Israeli occupation is a longstanding crisis that demands international attention and action for accountability. Two appalling past examples are the murders of renowned Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by IOF in Jenin on 11 May 2022, and of Palestinian photojournalist Yasser Murtaja on 6 April 2018 while he was covering the Great March of Return in Gaza. These attacks happened well before the current Israeli campaign against journalists in Gaza, which has reached unprecedented levels of violence.

The UN Human Rights Office, which has repeatedly condemned the situation faced by Palestinian journalists, published the recent testimony of a reporter in the OPT: *'Press vests have transformed from a means of protection into targets for attack.'*

This exhibit pays tribute to the lives of the many journalists taken by this illegal occupation—one of the many tragedies and injustices endured during the ongoing Nakba against the Palestinian people. These photographs reveal different facets of this tragic story through the lenses of Fatima Hassouna and Mauricio Morales Duarte.

THE PHOTOJOURNALISTS

Fatima Hassouna, a gifted young photojournalist from Gaza City and a recent graduate of Gaza's University College of Applied Sciences, rose to global prominence through her powerful documentation of life — and death — amid the latest devastating Israeli aggression on Gaza. Through her work — published both by professional media outlets and on her Instagram account followed by over 40,000 people — Fatima offered the world a deeply human perspective: a story of survival, strength, and dignity in besieged Gaza. Her talent, courage, and radiant personality became the focus of the upcoming documentary *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk*, which was selected to premiere at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival.

But her growing reach likely put her on the radar of the Israeli military. On April 16, 2025 — just one day after Cannes announced the film's selection — an Israeli airstrike targeted her home, killing Fatima, her pregnant sister, and eight other members of her family.

Mauricio Morales Duarte (1982) is a Colombian photojournalist with a degree in Audiovisual Media from Politécnico University of Bogotá. He has been a fellow at several prestigious programs, including RNTC in the Netherlands, the Dart Center at Columbia

University, and Thomson Reuters Foundation. His work has appeared in international news agencies like AFP, EPA, Polaris, and Sipa Press, and in major outlets such as The New York Times, Time Lightbox, France 24, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, Univision, and NBC News.

Morales has extensively covered conflict and its impact on civilians in Colombia and the Middle East, including Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Palestine. In 2024 and 2025, he has focused on documenting the destruction caused by the latest Israeli offensive against Palestinian communities in the occupied West Bank, as well as the increasing threats faced by local journalists who continue to report under the occupation.

OBJECTIVES

1. **To raise awareness about the systematic targeting of Palestinian journalists** and situate these attacks within the context of international humanitarian and human rights law and the need to ensure accountability for these crimes.
2. **To underscore the consequences of violating international legal protections for journalists**, as established in the Geneva Conventions, international treaties, and UN resolutions.
3. **To explore Israel's legal responsibilities as the occupying power** in Gaza and the rest of the OPT, in relation to press freedom and the safety of journalists.
4. **To critically assess specific Israeli policies and practices** that obstruct the work of Palestinian and international media professionals.
5. **To foster dialogue on the role of the international community**, including the United Nations, in promoting accountability and safeguarding press freedom.

EVENT PROGRAM

1. ***Journalism during genocide: a conversation with Ms. Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967***

***Tuesday, June 10, 3:00pm - 4:30pm
Conference Room CR5, UNHQ.***

Guiding Questions

• How can we understand the systematic killing of Palestinian journalists in the context of international law and press freedom? • What legal protections, conventions, and treaties are violated when journalists are targeted? • What obligations does Israel, as the occupying power, have under international law to protect freedom of the press in Gaza and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory? • What specific policies or practices implemented by Israel hinder the work of Palestinian and international journalists on the ground?

Run of Show:

—Welcome remarks (3 min)

- H.E. Mr. Riyad H. Mansour, Minister and Ambassador, State of Palestine
Opening remarks (5 min.)
- Keynote speech: Ms. Francesca Albanese
The war on press freedom in Gaza and the OPT. (15 min.)
- Nour Swirki, Palestinian Journalist & Human Rights Defender
The situation in Gaza (video conference, 8 min)
- Mr. Mauricio Morales, Colombian Photojournalist
Reporting from the ground in the West Bank: 2024 & 2025 (10 min.).
- Mr. Clayton Weimers, Executive Director, Reporters Without Borders:
The Failure of International Legal Protections for journalists (8 min.).
- Audience Q&A (15 min)
- Closing remarks: H.E. Mr. Juan José Quintana, DPR of Colombia (3 min.)

2. Exhibition opening: *The War on Truth: Press freedom under Israeli occupation*

Tuesday, June 10, 6:00pm - 7:30pm
Curved Wall, UNHQ

- H.E. Mr. Riyad H. Mansour, Minister and Ambassador, State of Palestine (6 min.)
 - Mr. Mauricio Morales remarks: reporting from the OPT in 2025 (4 min.)
 - Mr. Clayton Weimers, Executive Director, Reporters Without Borders (4 min.)
 - Juan José Quintana, DPR - Colombia PM (Closing remarks, 3 min.)
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TEXT IN LEAFLET TO BE DISTRIBUTED AT EVENT

SIDE A

THE WAR ON TRUTH
Press freedom under Israeli occupation

In the past 19 months, more than 210 journalists — the vast majority of them Palestinian, including 28 women — have been killed by Israeli occupying forces, primarily in military attacks in Gaza. This figure has been independently verified by the UN

Human Rights Office. In addition, at least 49 Palestinian journalists have been unlawfully detained and subjected to inhumane treatment while in Israeli custody.

During this same period, **Israel has systematically obstructed the work of journalists** across the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and **barred foreign journalists from entering Gaza**, aiming to prevent documentation of the widespread destruction, mass civilian casualties and unbearable human suffering resulting from its ongoing genocidal campaign against the Palestinian population.

Journalists who have managed to survive and continue reporting from the ground face brutal conditions — including **forced displacement, lack of shelter, starvation, disease, and constant existential threats** — as Israeli violence ravages families and infrastructure and inflicts **conditions prohibitive to life in Gaza**.

As the horrific casualty count makes clear, **Palestinian media workers are being systematically targeted by Israel and denied the protections to which they are entitled under international law** — a longstanding crisis that demands urgent international attention and accountability.

Those striving to tell the world the story of the Palestinian people — and to expose the truth about the genocide in Gaza — are under direct attack. **We are witnessing a war on truth.**

SIDE B

'Press vests have transformed from a means of protection into targets for attack.'

- Testimony of a Palestinian journalist gathered by the UN Human Rights Office.

TEXT FATIMA

Fatima Hassouna was a young Palestinian writer, photographer, and journalist from Gaza. A passionate storyteller, she used her lens to document not only the atrocities and devastation ruthlessly inflicted by the illegal Israeli occupation, but also the unwavering resilience, beauty, and humanity of the Palestinian people.

After earning a degree in media and communications, **Fatima dedicated herself to capturing the harsh realities of life in besieged Gaza—amplifying voices others tried to silence.** As a youth advocate with Plan International, her work resonated far beyond her homeland; her photographs and writing reached audiences around the world. **At just 25,**

her growing impact was recognized internationally—her life story even featured in a documentary selected for the 2025 Cannes Film Festival.

The day after the Cannes selection was announced, **Fatima was killed—along with nine members of her family, including her pregnant sister—in an Israeli airstrike that deliberately targeted their home.**

Fatima’s legacy is a testament to courage, creativity, and an unshakable commitment to truth. In honoring her memory, we also honor the hundreds of journalists whose lives have been taken by Israel in retaliation for amplifying the plight of the Palestinian people. Their sacrifice continues to advance the struggle for freedom and justice—awakening the global conscience and inspiring millions to stand against the brutality of colonialism and occupation.

“To live in Gaza is to live between two deaths. But in between, we dance, we love, we create.”

—Fatima Hassouna



SELECTION



OF FOTOS BY MAURICIO MORALES



