



## The Alternative Information Center (AIC)

ON THE PALESTINIAN/ISRAELI CONFLICT & MIDDLE EAST POLITICS  
P.O.Box 31417 Jerusalem 91313 [alternativenews.org](http://alternativenews.org)

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25 July 2016

Criteria and Standards Subcommittee  
Open Government Partnership

Letter of Complaint

The Alternative Information Center (AIC) is writing to express concern that the state of Israel is seemingly acting in a manner that undermines the values of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and to request that an inquiry be initiated in this matter. The AIC is concerned that Israel is violating its commitment to “protecting the ability of not-for-profit and civil society organisations to operate in ways consistent with our commitment to freedom of expression, association and opinion”. This commitment is enshrined in the Open Government Declaration which Israel accepted upon joining the OGP .

Specifically and in regard to the Alternative Information Center, Israel:

1. Severely restricts the freedom of movement of AIC staff and members:
2. Encourages action against “anti-Israeli” groups

### Alternative Information Center (AIC)

The AIC is a non-profit association registered in Israel. Founded in 1986, the AIC acts to collect, research and disseminate information about issues related to society, policy, education, culture and labour relations. The methodology of the AIC is joint Israeli-Palestinian work to provide the most comprehensive understandings of the aforementioned issues in all of their facets in Israel and Israeli-controlled territories.

### Restrictions on freedom of movement

Palestinian residents of the occupied Palestinian territory (OPTs) must receive individual permits from Israeli military authorities to leave and travel for specific purposes between the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, as well as to enter Israel. As detailed by the United Nations Secretary-General in a report dated 20 January 2016, the nature of restrictions on the freedom of movement in the West Bank are both physical (checkpoints, Separation Wall) and bureaucratic (permits, the closure of areas).

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Palestinian staff and members of the AIC are thus not permitted by Israeli authorities to enter Israel while Israeli staff and members of the organisation are not permitted to enter Area A of the West Bank, where the majority of their Palestinian colleagues work. The AIC working methodology of joint Palestinian – Israeli work is thus effectively criminalised by Israeli authorities.

For information on topics such as society, policy and culture to be accurate and comprehensive, it must necessarily come from and reflect the understandings, realities, facts and analyses of both Israelis and Palestinians who live under Israeli control and legal frameworks. Israel's aforementioned limitations on freedom of movement thus directly impinge upon the AIC capacity to effectively fulfill its mission.

These severe restrictions on the work of Israeli and Palestinian AIC human rights defenders further duplicate organisational costs of the organisation, which is accordingly forced to maintain two offices – one in Israel and one in Area A of the West Bank – as a direct result of Israeli restrictions on freedom of movement. This doubling of costs such as rent, utilities, office services, administration and supplies represents a severe and ongoing financial and organisational burden which fundamentally and negatively impacts all AIC work.

Freedom of movement is a crucial prerequisite for the attainment of additional human rights. By severely and consistently restricting the freedom of movement of AIC staff and supporters, the rights of association, expression and opinion of the AIC – its individual staff members and supporters, as well as a registered association – are violated.

Encourages action against “anti-Israeli” groups

The website of the AIC was hacked and destroyed on 8 June 2016. Hackers broke through the firewall and infected a tremendous number of files, allowing them to take over our website. The website had previously been hacked in May, although to a much lesser degree.

A complaint in this matter was filed with the Israeli police on 13 June 2016.

The hackers then used our website as a base from which to send worms to at least one additional website critical of Israeli policy, causing Google and other search engines to block our site. Following loss of control over the website and the large number of corrupted files, the AIC took the decision to delete its previous website and build a new one, scheduled to go online by 25 July 2016.

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In keeping with its mandate, the AIC website was the organisation's premiere outlet for the dissemination and reporting of information under its remit, i.e. information about issues related to society, policy, education, culture and labour relations. One of the topics on which the website reported was the efforts of civil society groups to promote the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) of Israel, as well as Israeli government and civil society responses to these groups.

While it is impossible to know who targeted the AIC's website, Israeli politicians have acted to undermine organisations critical of Israeli policy, especially those supporting the BDS movement. This year, the Israeli government allocated at least \$26 million dollars to fight BDS activities and all efforts to "delegitimise Israel" and appointed Strategic Affairs Minister Gilard Erdan to lead the initiative.

In early October 2015, reports indicated that the Strategic Affairs Ministry would gather overt and covert intelligence on boycott organizations and find ways to undermine them. There is also indication that a large component of the Ministry's work is to coordinate swaths of pro-Israeli NGOs to collaborate with the Israeli government's efforts.

More clues on Israel's anti-BDS rhetoric and actions emerged in January, at the third annual Cybertech conference in Tel Aviv. There, at a special invite-only session "devoted to using Israel's cyber abilities to fight the BDS movement," Sima Vaknin-Gil, the General Director of Erdan's ministry said, "I want to create a community of fighters." Erdan added: "BDS should be forced to defend themselves and not to attack Israel." Later, at a panel on BDS at the Herzliya Conference in June, Erdan's rhetoric escalated further: "the message has to be that it's not worth being a BDS activist. "Anybody who works to delegitimize Israel, to bring an end to the Zionist enterprise, they should know that there will be a price." "It needs to start here in Israel," he concluded.

Whether or not Israeli officials are behind attacks on human rights organizations, their rhetoric seems to be having the effect of riling up "pro-Israel" activists to intimidate on their own. Along with many others, the AIC received an email in June 2016 from a French group called the Jewish Brigade. According to the Electronic Intifada, the email possibly contained malware. It read: "Dear boycotter, we have are [sic] a very particular set of skills, skills we [sic] have acquired over a very long career. Skills that make us a nightmare for people like you."

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In the text it contributed upon entering the OGP, Israel notes that its “Government believes in the public's right to examine and critique and supervise governmental action, and the public's need to review the activities of publicly-elected officials and civil workers according to clearly defined benchmarks.” The aforementioned actions seemingly belie this lofty statement.

### Summary

As the Government of Israel notes in the text it contributed upon joining the Open Government Partnership, “the goal of open government policy is to empower the individual, the society and the state on the basis of three fundamental principles: transparency and active reporting to the public; public participation; and accountability. Yet Israeli actions as impacting the AIC and as described above, strengthen the state at the short and long-term expense of the individual and society. Membership in the Open Government Partnership provides an essential platform for rendering governments to become more sustainably transparent, more accountable and more responsive to their own citizens. Yet for this platform to be effective and not simply a matter of prestige and public relations for its members, parties must take their commitments under the September 2011 Open Government Declaration seriously.

The AIC is aware that People against Suffering, Oppression and Poverty (PASSOP) is a civil society organisation based in South Africa which is involved in the OGP at the national and international levels. PASSOP has full AIC support and awareness of this process. The AIC accordingly and respectfully requests that the Criteria and Standards Subcommittee open an inquiry into Israel's possible violation of OGP values.

Respectfully

Michel Warschawski  
Dr. Majed Nassar  
Co-Chairpersons, AIC Board of Directors