

The Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Asiatisk Plads 2
1448 Copenhagen K.

Copenhagen on 26 January 2018

Re.: The review by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian and Israeli civil society organisations supported by Denmark

Dear Anders Samuelsen

We are writing to you as organisations that are all present in the occupied Palestinian territories and therefore work on a daily basis with the consequences of occupation and conflict. Besides the obvious humanitarian and human consequences we are also witnessing daily violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We therefore fully support the focus of Denmark's country policy for Palestine on strengthening human rights and democratic control – including the support for the work of Israeli and Palestinian civil society to address their respective authorities about violations of rights.

The background for our inquiry is the decision to tighten the conditions for the Danish assistance to human rights organisations, as well as statements made to the media that it has been decided to leave a longstanding donor cooperation.

We fully respect that it is a political task to decide which organisations should be supported and which should not. At the same time, we believe that it is crucial that the basis for such decisions is transparent, professionally grounded and in line with the principles that have so far been the driving force behind Danish aid policy. Those principles are confirmed in the foreign- and security policy strategy from 2017, of which it appears that:

We shall insist that international cooperation is based on rules and norms applicable to all countries. We shall fight for the values and freedoms that our society is built on. We want a world with more democracy and freedom, including more freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and more public order.

According to the internal review conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of organisations having received Danish support, no violations of the contractual basis with Denmark have been found. At the same time an external evaluation of the same organisations has not given rise to remarks, but has, on the contrary, emphasized the positive effects of the assistance. In combination with an increasing pressure on both the Palestinian and Israeli civil society and their donors, Denmark's changed conditions are likely to leave the impression that the arguments behind the decision are not aid professional, but rather political considerations.

The continued unclarity about the character of the criteria, which will be the basis for selecting a reduced number of partner organisations going forward, raise - probably unjustified - doubt about whether those criteria will be formulated on an aid professional basis, and as such could be used for Danish support to civil society organisations in other countries.

We would therefore encourage you to take the necessary steps to remove any doubt that has arisen about the basic principles for Danish foreign policy, including the rights-based approach, strong aid professionalism and objectivity. In addition, we would like to encourage that the criteria used for the reduction in the number of supported organisations are made public, so it becomes clear that these do not compromise the principles that were last confirmed in the government's own strategy.

We are of course available for elaborating the above and would gladly enter a dialogue on objective criteria, as well as the implementation of the foreign and security policy goals of a world with more democracy and freedom, including more freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and public order.

Best regards,

Birgitte Qvist-Sørensen
General Secretary, DanChurchAid

Tim Whyte
General Secretary, ActionAid Denmark

Marc Schade-Poulsen
Executive Director, EuroMed Rights

Jonas Keiding Lindholm
General Secretary, Save the Children Denmark

Mie Roesdahl
General Secretary, OXFAM Ibis

Karin Verland
Director, DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture