

Palestinian surgeon Ghassan Abu Sitta's Schengen-wide travel ban overturned

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Abu Sitta's legal team successfully overturned the travel ban against British-Palestinian doctor who worked in Gaza

British-Palestinian plastic surgeon Ghassan Abu Sitta speaks to press during a pro-Palestine demonstration at University College London's main entrance, on 3 May 2024 (Benjamin Cremel/AFP)

Germany's travel ban against British-Palestinian doctor Ghassan Abu Sitta has been overturned, according to a leading legal advocacy group in the UK.

The International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) announced in a social media post on Tuesday that it, along with lawyer Alexander Gorski and the European Legal Support Centre, had successfully challenged the travel ban imposed on Abu Sitta by Germany.

"The travel ban put on me for the Shengen area countries has been lifted," Abu Sitta said on X, formerly known as Twitter, on Tuesday.

On 12 April, Abu Sitta was detained at an airport in Germany and was refused entry into the country. He was travelling there to attend a conference on Palestine that he had received an invitation for.

He was then slapped with a Schengen-wide travel ban for one year, which barred him from travelling to 29 countries across Europe.

He was also told he could not join the German conference virtually, as that would "constitute a breach of German law" and could result in either a fine or up to a year in prison.

On 4 May, Abu Sitta was due to speak at the French Senate but he was similarly barred from entering France. He was also prevented from entering the Netherlands, according to the ICJP.

The ICJP statement said the travel ban was "the latest attempt at harassment of the war surgeon since his return to the United Kingdom".

The entry ban sparked outrage from rights groups, who demanded to know why the German government had imposed the restriction in the first place.

"This decision is a significant turning point in challenging the hostile environment that Palestinian human rights advocates like Professor Ghassan have faced in recent months," Gorski, Abu Sitta's lawyer, said in a statement.

"This decision means that Ghassan's freedom of expression and freedom of movement are no longer under threat, and he can speak out about what he witnessed in Gaza. This victory cannot be

overstated.”

Since leaving Gaza in late November, Abu Sitta has been raising awareness about the impact of Israel’s war on Gaza, which has killed more than 34,500 Palestinians.

In the initial weeks after Israel began its assault, Abu Sitta travelled to Gaza to offer his help to the enclave’s hospitals, as they were facing daily bombardment.

In the first few months of the war, he became the unofficial English-language representative of Palestinian doctors and surgeons treating Palestinians wounded by Israeli attacks.

He has accused Israel’s military of using white phosphorus, which is illegal in built-up and populated areas like Gaza, and deliberately targeting children.

In an interview with MEE after he left Gaza, Abu Sitta said medics were using household items to treat patients because of an Israeli-imposed blockade on medical equipment entering the enclave.

“Eventually, everything was running out. Initially, we replaced the antiseptic solution with washing-up liquid and vinegar,” Abu Sitta said.

MEE staff

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