

The Israeli government is trying to destroy human rights organizations

Wednesday 26 February 2025, by [B'Tselem](#) (Date first published: 24 February 2025).

Two bills that recently passed a preliminary reading in the Knesset are part of a calculated assault by the government on Israeli civil society. The aim is clear: eliminate human rights groups, including B'Tselem, silence government critics and stop us from fulfilling our mission to defend human rights (this attack will also damage important organizations fighting for environmental protection, LGBTQ+ rights and more).

Simply put, the "ICC law" criminalizes our work by making human rights defense a punishable offense, while the "NGO taxation law" is designed to drain our financial resources.

These measures are currently targeting human rights organizations, but they are part of a broader pattern of Israeli government initiatives to harm the people living here, abandon them and wipe them out - this time, by silencing those who wish to protect them.

NGO Taxation

The approved law slaps an 80% tax on donations from foreign countries, the UN and many international foundations that support human rights. This will effectively cut off funding for the defense of human rights. The goal of the law is to destroy human rights organizations by crippling our financial sources. It is explicitly aimed at silencing criticism of the government's destructive policies, and eliminating any Israeli opposition to the harm inflicted on Palestinians by the hard-right government.

This bill is the latest move in a 15-year campaign of legislative maneuvers and public smear campaigns aimed at discrediting transparent, supervised funding from democratic countries in order to delegitimize human rights organizations. It even includes a corrupt political loophole that allows representatives of the far-right government to offer a tax exemption for donations to favored groups, while focusing the attack on a handful of organizations.

This legislative amendment is pure intimidation, designed to deter organizations and individuals from criticizing government actions by threatening harsh retaliation.

The ICC Law

The second bill passed this week seeks to criminalize any cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC). Its sweeping language could be used to criminalize not only active assistance to the court but also the release of any information suggesting that the government or senior Israeli officials are committing war crimes or crimes against humanity. Under this law, nearly all B'Tselem's work - reporting, researching and publishing on serious violations of Palestinians' human rights - could be punished by at least five years in prison.

Notably, the ICC's arrest warrants for Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Gallant are not based on work by Israeli organizations, but on official statements made by Israeli decision-makers, among other things.

Israel continues to perpetrate crimes, flouting every law, norm and moral principle. Now, it is seeking to hide its crimes and silence those who document and report them. We will continue our work to resist the occupation and apartheid and champion a future of freedom, equality and full human rights for everyone between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

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P.S.

• B'Tselem. 24 February 2025:

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