Israel blocks EU delegation from entering occupied Palestinian territories

Palestinian youth pay tribute to slain Al-Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh in Gaza City. Photo: AFP

Tel Aviv, May 23 (RHC)-- Israel has blocked a European Parliament delegation from entering the occupied Palestinian territories to review the situation on the ground in the aftermath of the murder of veteran Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

On Sunday, the EU delegation was forced to cancel a trip to the occupied Palestinian territories after Manu Pineda, a Spanish member of the European Parliament and chair of the parliament's delegation for relations with Palestine, was denied entry to Israel.

"Israel is blocking the work of the European Parliament," Pineda said on Sunday, noting that the delegation had also been denied access to the besieged Gaza Strip.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry claimed that Pineda's entry was not approved due to "information received from the competent authorities in Israel." European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, who arrived in Israel for a three-day visit on Sunday, said on Twitter that she regretted the decision and would raise the issue with the Israeli authorities.

But Grace O'Sullivan, a member of the delegation, said the group would urge a strong response to the "unprecedented move" from Metsola. O'Sullivan said the six-member delegation was going to visit Palestinians working "in the most difficult circumstances, especially in light of the recent killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh."

Abu Akleh, a veteran of the Qatar-based Al Jazeera network's Arabic service, was shot in the head earlier this month when she was reporting on an Israeli raid against Palestinians living in the Jenin refugee camp.   Her tragic death sent shockwaves across the globe, drawing global condemnation against the Israeli regime.

O'Sullivan said that "we took a decision that the Israeli authorities shouldn't be allowed to pick and choose who they wanted to come" and canceled the trip.

Chris MacManus, another member of the delegation slammed the Israeli decision as "a direct interference with the work of the European Parliament." "It shouldn't be tolerated. It will require serious discussion [in] the coming days. We need to see a firm diplomatic response coming from European Union," MacManus said.

In 2016, a working group of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Palestine was denied entry to Gaza. No justification was given by the Israeli authorities for the decision back then.

Since June 2007, the Gaza Strip has been under a tight Israeli siege, which has caused a sharp decline in living standards, including unprecedented levels of unemployment and unrelenting poverty, in the besieged enclave.

Israel has also launched three major wars against the enclave since 2008, killing thousands of Gazans each time and shattering the impoverished territory's already poor infrastructure.

Israel occupied East al-Quds, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip during the Six-Day War in 1967. It later had to withdraw from Gaza but has been occupying the other territories ever since.

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